

3. ✓  
SPEECH

OF



MR. JAS. WILSON, OF N. HAMPSHIRE,

ON

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF SLAVERY, AND THE EXPE-  
DIENCY OF PERMITTING SLAVERY IN THE TERRI-  
TORIES RECENTLY ACQUIRED FROM MEXICO :

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES,

FEBRUARY 16, 1849.

---

WASHINGTON:

PRINTED BY J. & G. S. GIDEON.

1849.

## SPEECH.

---

The bill to provide for carrying into execution, in part, the 12th article of the treaty with Mexico, being under discussion—the House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. WILSON addressed the committee substantially as follows.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I deem it unnecessary to make any apology to the committee for breaking the silence which I have studiously imposed on myself since taking my seat in this Congress. I propose to speak of slavery, deeming it *the question*, not merely of this country, but of the whole Christian world—emphatically the question of the age, and its discussion upon this floor fit and proper, in reference to its influences and bearings upon our national affairs.

The honorable gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. HILLIARD,) the other day, spoke truly in regard to the effects of slavery in the southern States of this Union; that they are isolated, cut off from the sympathy of the Christian States of the world, by reason of that peculiar domestic institution. I concur entirely with the honorable gentleman in that opinion, and award to him high credit for his honest, frank, manly avowal of that truth upon this floor. I rejoice, sir, that the truth is known to southern gentlemen, and proclaimed here by one of their number of large experience and acknowledged ability.

It has been said by some one, that “man is the child of circumstance.” It is a sage remark, and true; and to me it is not surprising that gentlemen should entertain different opinions, and should rise here in debate and express opposite views, upon the subject of slavery. I know, can feel, and realize, that my own views and opinions are influenced much by the impressions received in childhood; and, while I am conscious of that in myself, it is but just to infer that other men are influenced by the circumstances with which they were surrounded during the receptive period of early life. It excites no marvel in my mind that gentlemen who have first seen the light of day at the South—who have first opened their eyes to the realities of life under the auspices of that institution—who were early taught to command, and that it was their right to be obeyed—who had but to say to a certain class of individuals around them, “Come,” and they would come; “Go,” and they would go. I can very well realize and understand how it is that gentlemen, accustomed from their childhood to command, being nurtured in this way up to the condition of manhood, should entertain entirely different opinions from those which I, and those who have been brought up as I have been, entertain. In the northern States of this Union, we are taught from childhood to look upon labor as the condition of life; to think from the outset that we are born to labor. The child is instructed and made to know that if he wants anything done within the compass of his own ability, he must do it for himself. He is encouraged to effort, and compelled, if need be, to make it. Labor becomes habit.

I have said, sir, that, in the free-labor States of this Union, even the little children are required to labor according to their intellectual ability and physical strength. Even from its cradle it is put to work. It is aroused from its morning slumbers to be greeted by the smiles of a kind mother, and is encouraged to make the effort to do for itself what it may be able to do. It is not, to be sure, furnished with the heavy tools, the drills and hammers, picks and gads, of the miner, and sent to sink shafts in trap rock or limestone, in search of copper ore; it is not furnished with a spade and windlass, rope and tub, and sent away to sink its shaft in clay diggings, in search of lead mineral. No, sir; but, its morning bath and wardrobe attended to, and its breakfast finished, it has its working tools, consisting of some simple books, carefully arranged in a little satchel, wrought all over with pictures of birds and butterflies and flowers, in gay colors, by the hand of a kind sister. Thus equipped, it is sent away to the village school, to work—to work. It begins to sink its shaft down into its own intellect; it sinks on and on, deeper and deeper. Encouraged by its success, it perseveres, until, by and by, it brings up to view, and for the use of mankind, treasures infinitely more valuable than the gold from the

mines of Mexico, or Peru, or California—gems more brilliant than ever sparkled upon the brow of queens, or blazed in the halls of royalty.

The powers of the mind, like the muscles of the body, must be trained and disciplined to vigorous, energetic, persevering effort, if they are to exhibit their full strength; and these are some of the results which we are justified in expecting from those whose early condition imposes upon them the necessity of early intellectual and physical labor.

It shall be my purpose, during the little time allotted to me by the rules of this House, to speak on the subject of slavery as connected with the political affairs of the country, regarding it merely in a political view, without attempting to discuss the question generally in its moral aspects. Upon this subject I desire to premise a few things, in order that I may be fully understood.

In the first place, I must say that I do not assent, to the fullest extent, to the charge which is sometimes made against the South with reference to the amount of physical suffering inflicted upon the African race. I do not believe that the slaves of the southern States are commonly subjected to those extreme physical sufferings so often affirmed by the opposers of slavery. I cannot believe it. Having never been taught to look upon all men as demons, I cannot think that there is, on the face of the earth, in any part of the Christian world, certainly not in this our own beloved country, any considerable number of persons devoid of every feeling of human sympathy. Considering the early and intimate relation that must necessarily subsist between the master and his slaves, I am constrained to believe that there must be a great deal of just sympathy felt by the superior for his inferior. There may be, and undoubtedly are, many exceptions. But I cannot doubt that, wherever a slaveholder exercises unreasonable severity towards his bond people—wherever he withholds from them reasonable necessary supplies for their physical comforts, or overtakes their physical strength—he is censured as severely, and his course condemned as heartily, by his brother slaveholders as he would be by the most ardent advocates of freedom.

But there is another point upon which I rest my chief objection to the institution, and that is, that the condition of the slave is absolutely and irretrievably fixed. There are no means of improvement left to the slave; he has no power—no hope of moral or intellectual elevation.

In the northern States of this Union there is no man so poor that he is without this hope, either for himself or his children. However broken and dilapidated the cabin that imperfectly shelters him; however meagre the stock of provisions on hand to supply the daily wants of himself and family; however scanty their wardrobes; still he has the cheering consciousness that he is a freeman. He has a bright and confident hope of better days for himself or for his children. There is nothing in the laws of the land where he lives to bind him down, and his children after him, to a condition of hopeless degradation. There is the village school-house hard by his dwelling. His children have equal privileges with those of the wealthiest. They associate on terms of perfect equality in the school-room; and often, quite often, is it that the son or the daughter of the poorest parents in the district stand at the head of the school for scientific attainment; they return home with the highest reward of merit from the teacher. Think you that the father or mother, as they gaze upon the gay and happy faces of their children, while those children exhibit the evidences of their triumphs at the school, stop to think of their own poverty, or yield to any despondency? No, sir. They are sustained by a bright, a cheering, a confident, hope. They would not exchange or barter that hope of a bright future for their children for any earthly consideration.

To the laboring slave population there is no such hope, either for the generation that now is, or for the long succession of generations that are to come in all future time.

Now, the great question before the country is, whether it be expedient for Congress to extend this institution of slavery into the Territories recently acquired from Mexico? I am aware of the charge which has been made, insisted upon, and

urged, reiterated here and elsewhere, in public speeches, and public documents, and papers of every class in the slave interest, that the North were constantly trespassing upon the South, because they would not consent to the passage of laws making more secure the right of the slaveholder to his property. I undertake to say that, for the last fifty years of the history of this Government, this great slavery question has been the very centre and focus of all our political action; the focal point around which every great national interest has revolved.

I might illustrate by a comparison with the movements of the planets in their orbits around the natural sun. The figure of speech would not be quite accurate and appropriate, because, when we speak of the natural sun, we convey to the mind the idea of light and heat, warmth and life-giving energy throughout the entire sphere of its influence; while that central point of our political action is as black and dark as Egyptian darkness; as cold, and heartless, and unsympathizing as the icebergs that roll in the Arctic ocean.

I must ask the indulgence of the committee for a few moments while I refer to the introduction of slavery into this continent. During the same year that the Pilgrim Fathers of New England were escaping from the oppressions that had been inflicted upon them in the old world; while they were buffeting the waves of the Atlantic, in a frail water craft, in pursuit of a land where they could be free to study their Bibles, and worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; in that same year (1620) a Dutch ship also found its way across the Atlantic, put into the mouth of James river, having on board some three or four-and-twenty Africans, who were brought to be sold into slavery. Such was the beginning of slavery in this country. The trade was soon monopolized by the English, and they continued to prosecute it with great vigor, it proving a convenient traffic to enable the mother country to extort the substance of the colonists. England was pursuing towards the colonies a system of policy by which she was enabled to convert to her own advantage the commercial value of all the labor of the country. To her it was a matter of perfect indifference what the kind of labor was; whether free or slave, its beneficial results all enured to her profit. Slaves were brought rapidly into the country. Influenced partly by climate, but much more by the peculiar characteristics of the settlers of the northern and southern provinces, much the greater number of slaves were taken to the southern. The northern people were a laboring people. They shrunk not from the most severe trials and deprivations; encountering a rigorous climate, a barren granite soil, and patiently bending to the hardest labor to sustain themselves and enjoy only their religious freedom. Their reliance was upon their own manly efforts. They did not look to others to do their work for them, that they might indulge in unproductive indolence. As a consequence of this state of things, there were but few slaves taken into the northern provinces.

Let me here direct the attention of the committee to the political condition of the Colonies for a series of years preceding the Revolution. The old thirteen Colonies were communities with interests separate and distinct from each other. There was no bond of union between them. They were each organized under its own royal charter, and the policy of England was to keep them as far as possible from forming any alliances, or becoming mutually dependent upon, or serviceable to, each other, by the free, unrestricted interchange of commercial commodities. This system of policy was rigidly enforced upon the Colonies by the mother country, until it became so oppressive that they separated themselves from the power of England; threw off the yoke of oppression; in 1776 declared themselves independent. In this act the old thirteen Colonies, or rather *the people* of the old thirteen Colonies, became "one united people," instead of thirteen separate provinces of the crown of England. In the Declaration of Independence they had first proclaimed to the world the great political truth of the equality of man, and his endowment by God with certain inalienable rights, among which are his right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This declaration was issued while the country was subjected to the severe, the agonizing trials of civil war. It was to be maintained by the rigo-

rous, unflinching prosecution of that war; and for six years the people of the Colonies did maintain themselves gloriously, and came triumphantly out of it. The pressure of that war kept the people united. They fought in the common cause. All their energies were united against the common enemy. They never once stopped to consider the difficulties and troubles which would beset them on every hand, whenever they should come to the trial of managing the affairs of Government in time of peace. In 1783 the war was terminated, and it was not till then they saw clearly the embarrassments which beset them in the government of the country in its new position.

They had no government. Then came the greatest trial of the patriots of the country. It was then that this question of slavery first presented itself, with its various conflicting interests, to annoy, perplex, and thwart them in their attempts to form a government of adequate strength and power, to answer all the requisite purposes of government.

The people of the United Colonies had solemnly declared that all men are created equal; were endowed by nature with certain inalienable rights, among which were life and liberty, and they could not safely renounce the principles of that declaration when they came to form a national compact.

This question of slavery, then intruding itself upon their councils, led the great men of the nation, if not absolutely to renounce it, at least to disregard it, and prompted them to make the attempt to form a government by Articles of Confederation, based upon a contract or agreement of "thirteen independent sovereignties." It was the existence of slavery in the southern States that led them into that fatal error, laying at the foundation of the Articles of Confederation, of "each State retaining its sovereignty." Those articles looked to the power of the States as sovereign, overlooking and disregarding the paramount truth, that sovereignty resided in the people. There was a jealousy at the South, where there were a great number of slaves, that if the several States surrendered their separate sovereignty to the General Government, the time would come when the great wrong of slavery, existing, as it did in violation of natural right, would be corrected by that General Government. From the experience derived during the time intervening between the years 1783 and 1787, it was found that the National Government could not be administered under the Articles of Confederation—a Constitution for the United States was requisite. I must ask the attention of the committee while I examine, very briefly, some of the circumstances connected with the formation of the Constitution of the United States.

And first, it is worthy of remark, that among all the great men of the nation of that period, there was not one who claimed to be, or who could properly be charged with being, a *perpetualist* upon the subject of slavery. No, sir; not one, from any part of the Union. The universal sentiment of the men of that age was against it; openly and distinctly expressed, against it. The fathers and founders of the Republic of that day were ardently looking forward to the time when this should become a great country, with a numerous population of industrious, prosperous, intelligent *freemen*; a time, and that not far distant, when there would be an end of slavery. Upon the most diligent search, I have been unable to find that there was a single man, of distinguished reputation and approved patriotism, among all those who met in the Convention to form the National Constitution, of whom it could be justly said that he was a perpetualist.

To sustain my view on this point, I first refer to the opinions of Thomas Jefferson. To that distinguished man was assigned the duty of draughting the Declaration of Independence. The great leading idea of that wonderful document is emphatically anti-slavery. It maintains the equality of all men, and the possession, by all men, of certain "*inalienable rights*," among which are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Can any thing go beyond this? Is it possible to find language that can more distinctly pronounce the condemnation of slavery than that used in the Declaration of Independence? I think not.

Again, in the original draught of the Declaration of Independence, as drawn up by

Mr. Jefferson, among other reasons which a due respect for the opinions of mankind rendered proper to be assigned for dissolving the political connexion that had previously existed between these States and the Kingdom of Great Britain, he places the following as a charge against King George III:

"He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people, who never offended him; captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce."

This charge, it is true, was stricken out of the Declaration before it was adopted by the Continental Congress. It was too clear and forcible in its language to suit the taste of some gentlemen. No matter for that. Jefferson wrote it; he reported it. It expresses his opinion as entertained at the time, and will so remain forever.

Still again, Mr. Jefferson, in his notes on Virginia, written about 1783 or '4, expresses, in the most full, clear, and unreserved manner, his opinions upon the character and influences of slavery on society. He calls it a system of unmitigated tyranny, and he deprecates its power upon the character of the young who are reared up to manhood under its baleful influence. In 1784 the subject of organizing some kind of government for that great region of country northwest of the Ohio was under consideration. Mr. Jefferson proposed the famous article that "slavery, or involuntary servitude, should not exist therein, except as a punishment for crime, of which the party should have been duly convicted."

This all preceded the famous ordinance of 1787, in which that article is included, and which finally was adopted, and which was subsequently recognised under the Constitution. I look upon Mr. Jefferson as the author of the article subsequently incorporated into the ordinance of 1787.

Mark you, Mr. Chairman, these opinions of Mr. Jefferson were the outbursts of his first love for free institutions and Republican government, unalloyed, unbiased, pure, and sincere. Let it not be said, then, that Mr. Jefferson, in the early stages of our political history, was a perpetualist. I have been careful in my researches into the early records and documents existing, and which could throw any light upon these matters; I have hunted up the famous Mecklenburg Declaration; I have examined the proceedings of the Congress under the Articles of Confederation and proceedings of the Convention for the formation of the Constitution; and I verily believe I am right in assigning to Mr. Jefferson the authorship of the sentiments expressed by him in the documents above referred to. Were I to write a history of American slavery, I should be constrained in all honesty and truth to say, that Mr. Jefferson was entitled to the credit of first publicly expressing anti-slavery sentiments in this country; that he was the prime originator of the anti-slavery movement.

I am aware, Mr. Chairman, that in after life Mr. Jefferson's opinions underwent some change; I am not surprised that it should have been so. The cautious, sagacious, wily politician found other opinions than those of the ardent, sincere, self-sacrificing young patriot to subserve his purposes and aspirations better. It could not escape the far-seeing mind of such a man as Jefferson, that the institution of slavery was one of those peculiarly constructed machines which the politician could readily turn to good account; that by it a kind of galvanic chain was constructed, connecting the heart-strings with the purse-strings of every slaveholder in the country; that by the working of this political telegraph it affected, through the nervous fluid, the brain of the whole slaveholding community. It was an engine of mighty political power in the hand of a skilful, sagacious operator. Mr. Jefferson undoubtedly saw how important it was to him, and he could not forego its use. But, sir, he had strewn upon the earth the seminal principle of a great truth; he had advertised the world of the true character of the slave trade and slavery; that truth had taken deep root; it was sending forth a vigorous growth, refreshing and invigorating over the whole country; even Mr. Jefferson himself, had he desired to destroy it, could not accomplish his purpose. He, and others in the same interest, might scathe its foliage with fire—might cut, and hack, and mar, and lop off its branches; although

the axe might be laid at its trunk, and girdled around its entire circumference—yea, although men might strike at its roots with plow and spade, and attempt to root it from the earth, still it could not be destroyed; for the truth was there; its roots were firmly fixed, and it would sprout again, strong, vigorous, and fresh, in spite of every assault that might be made upon it; it was destined to remain as indestructible as the great truths that lay at the foundation of the throne of the Deity.

I must be allowed to refer the committee, in support of my allegation that there were no perpetualists in the convention assembled to form the Constitution, to the Madison papers, pages 1137, 1263, 1447. I must refer to the letters of Washington; to the speeches of Governor Morris; Wilson, of Pennsylvania; and Dawes and others, in Elliot's Debates; and also to the famous speech of Luther Martin, of Maryland.

I am to speak by and by of the propriety of extending slavery to the new Territories, and I must beg of the committee to carry along with them this fact in mind, *that there were no perpetualists among the fathers of the Constitution.*

The early patriots of the land, seeing the necessity of an organized national government, the convention came together for the purpose of forming a Constitution for the United States. The necessity was imperative. The public safety required it; and it was required as well, in order to provide the means of paying the public debt, as to provide for the common defence and general welfare. The convention came together clothed with the sovereign power of the people. They assumed to speak for the people, and to make an instrument which should depend upon the authority of "We, the people," for its vitality. Now, sir, mark the date of this convention, 1787. Let the members of this committee ask themselves, *for what* was that convention to form a constitution? *For what?* Clearly the convention was to form a Constitution for *the United States*. Now, what was the United States in 1787?

Were I to go to your State of Florida, Mr. Chairman, and were I to be so far charmed by the beauty of the country and the salubrity of the climate as to entertain the design of settling there, and I should begin to talk with you about purchasing a farm, we would first try to ascertain its boundaries; we would try to raise the surveyor's monuments, his section corners and his quarter section posts, his mounds or his marked trees; we would ascertain by chain and compass the quantity of land contained in *the farm*. As our negotiation or treaty of bargain and sale progressed, we should adopt and use, invariably, the definite mode of expression; we should speak of *the farm*, and our conversation would be definite and intelligible. Apply this plain, common sense view of the subject to the case which I am considering, viz., the assembling of a convention to form a Constitution for *the United States*, as the United States was then, in the year of our Lord 1787. Can any thing be clearer? To ascertain what then constituted the United States, it was only necessary to refer to the treaty with England of 1783. There we find what was the United States; what every body must mean when they spoke of the United States; what every public document must mean when it referred to the United States, viz., to a certain, definite, distinct, well defined tract or portion of the earth's surface, with the people who inhabited it. The geographical extent of the United States, marked and defined in the treaty of 1783, is set out as follows: The eastern boundary was on the Passamaquoddy bay, the Schoodic or St. Croix river, and a straight line running north from a certain point on the Schoodic to the northwest corner of Nova Scotia, on the highlands that divide the waters emptying into the Atlantic ocean from those emptying into the St. Lawrence; thence southward and westward along said highlands until it struck the westernmost branch of Connecticut river; down said river to 45° of north latitude; west along said parallel of latitude until it struck the St. Lawrence; through the great lakes and the channels of the streams to the Lake of the Woods; from thence southerly to the head waters of the Mississippi; down the main channel of the Mississippi until it intersected the northern boundary of Louisiana; eastwardly along said northern boundary of Louisiana and the northern boundary line of Florida to the Atlantic ocean; and on the said ocean northeastwardly to the Passamaquoddy bay. That was to be the United States; and, after the treaty of 1783, *was* the United States.

There was, then, a certain, distinct, and definite tract of country to which the Constitution of the United States was to apply. And, now, let me ask any member of the committee to take the journal of that convention in his hand, and say whether he could believe that the men of that convention were brought together for the purpose of framing a Constitution for *the United States*, did, in fact, form an instrument with all the properties of a monstrous gum-elastic overshoe inverted, the toe of which could be drawn on over the north pole, and the heel hitched down over some tall mountain near the Isthmus of Darien?

The very idea is too preposterous to be entertained for a moment by any sensible man of fair impartial mind.

I will venture to assert, that the framers of the Constitution no more thought that the Constitution which they were making for the United States had the capacity to operate over the whole continent of North America, than they thought it capable of being extended to operate over Siberia and China, and the Islands in the Indian ocean. Certain it is, such an idea never entered the heads of the honest republican people who adopted it and gave it validity, as containing and prescribing a form of government adapted to their wants, their security, and their welfare.

The Constitution adopted, the illustrious Washington was called, by the unanimous voice of his fellow-citizens, to the administration of public affairs. He held the first office under the Constitution for eight years, and declined a re-election. During his administration the affairs of the country went on in comparative quiet. He was from a slave State and a slaveholder, yet he could realize that he was the President of the whole country. He could appreciate talent and patriotism and integrity wherever he found it, in northern men as well as southern. If there was fault found with him, it did not come from northern men.

A President from the North succeeded the great and the good Washington. He was a man of high abilities, of as pure a patriotism as ever warmed a human being, of as ardent a love for free republican institutions as ever glowed in a human heart, as firm a friend to the cause of freedom as could be found in the Union; but he was a northern man. The slave power of the country could not brook him. He failed of a re-election. He was prostrated, and for twenty-four years consecutively, the Presidency was given to the slave States, with all its patronage and all its power.

I could wish, Mr. Chairman, that I had time to go fully into the discussion of the political power and influence of the slave States, in connection with the election to the Presidency. For forty-eight years, out of sixty, has the office of President been held by persons identified with the slave interest. The mighty power of Executive influence has been, again, and again, and again, in instances innumerable, invoked and used to carry measures in which the slave States felt a deep interest, and adverse, yea ruinous, to the great interests of the free labor of the country. I am precluded, by the one hour rule, from doing so at this time.

I am compelled to hurry on to the consideration of other matters, for the purpose of showing that the slave power of the country for the last fifty years has governed the country, in relation to all great and important leading political questions; and particularly such questions as related to the extension of slave territory and the perpetuity of the slave institution, and the consequent overthrow of the political rights and interests of the free people of the free States of this Union.

In 1803, when the proposition first came up for the purchase of Louisiana, Mr. Jefferson, after having negotiated for the purchase, stated openly, that the territory could not be obtained and annexed to the United States without an amendment of the Constitution. But it was obviously a most desirable country, embracing a most salubrious climate, and the best soil in the world. It became almost indispensable to our great western country, for the reason that it had control of the outlet of the Mississippi river. This began to be seen as early as 1804 or 1805; and the common voice of the country assented to the purchase, under the necessity which every person felt of having the control of the mouth of the Mississippi river. The purchase was accordingly made. Louisiana having been, long previously, settled by a mixed population of French and Spanish descent, slavery already existed there,



and it was not proposed to interrupt it in that portion of the country settled at the time of the purchase.

But, in the year 1819 or 1820, another portion of this country, the Territory of Missouri, which had been in the hands of the Indian tribes up to the time of its purchase by the United States, was ready to come into the Union.

I must here remark, that when the slave power of the country once resolves upon any peculiar measure of policy it always holds on to it. It never gives back. In the classic language of the Hon. Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, when it once gets its *grip* upon any territory it never lets go.

When the famous Missouri proposition was first submitted to Congress, to come into the Union as a slaveholding State, it was resisted by Congress; and by a vote in the House of Representatives the proposition was defeated. The question of admission was decided against Missouri, if she insisted upon coming in with power to hold slaves, and the consequent right of slave representation.

But the matter was not to be determined so. At a subsequent time it was brought up again, and persevered in, until finally the purpose of the slave power was accomplished, and the State of Missouri was admitted with the institution of slavery upon her.

It has not required hitherto any great sagacity to be a politician in this country. The veriest tyro may, by very little attention, be as skilful in determining political results, whether relating to measures or elections, as the most experienced politician in the land. He has only to find out, with reasonable certainty, what the slave power determines shall be done in the given case, and so he may be sure it will be done. The rule is simple, easily understood, and subject to no embarrassing exceptions. I should like to appropriate the rest of my hour to illustrate this, by reference to various cases in our political history, in connexion with almost every great and agitating question which has excited the country during the last half century. Peace and war, currency, tariff, public lands, internal improvements, appointments to office, questions of rejection from confirmation, Indian negotiations and removals, each and all of them furnish more or less examples and apt illustrations. But as the acquisition of territory, out of which to form slave States, has the prominent place, and is the most palpable instance of the overweening determination of the slave power to extend and perpetuate itself, and govern the country according to its own sovereign pleasure, I must confine myself to that.

Florida was purchased and annexed. A Florida war was prosecuted; some twenty or thirty millions were expended in that war, and it is well known to every man of reflection that the chief object of that purchase, and the subsequent expensive war to drive out a small number of wandering Indians, was to give greater security to slave property and slave power.

I come now to the consideration of another case more recent and more extraordinary, in the circumstances attendant upon its annexation, than any that have preceded it. The committee must indulge me while I examine it somewhat in detail. It is an important case, and ought to be thoroughly understood by every American politician. If I do not misjudge, it inflicted the deepest wound upon the Constitution that ever has been inflicted upon that time-honored instrument since its adoption. It has depleted it to the very verge of endurance. Another such wound, only one more, if we can ever imagine another administration capable of making it, and my life on it, the poor, insulted, abused Constitution will faint and die under the operation. I am not quite sure it can survive the last infliction. I must be understood, by every person who does me the honor to listen to me, to allude to the annexation of Texas, and all the circumstances antecedent which led to it, and subsequent as growing out of and dependent upon it.

During the administration of Mr. Van Buren application had been made by Texas to this Government to be taken into our Federal Union. Mr. Van Buren, notwithstanding he had been elected as a "Northern man with Southern principles," could not so far forget his oath to support the Constitution of his own country, nor could he so far disregard the plighted faith of this country to Mexico, as to give his assent

to the application of Texas for admission. He was compelled to direct his Secretary of State, Mr. Forsyth, to return a negative answer to the application of Texas. That honest answer was the bowie knife which let the life-blood out of poor Mr. Van Buren.

On the 11th of May, 1843, the last member of the Harrison Cabinet left public employment in the administration of John Tyler. The country was then in a peculiar position. Mr. Tyler was acting President without a party. The Whig party which elected him had left him. A complete separation had taken place between them. The great Democratic party would not adopt and sustain either him or his measures. Now, in this state of things, what was Mr. Tyler to do? There was but one course left for him. That course was obvious. He was himself identified with the great slave interest of the country. There was in this country a third party—a kind of "*tertium quid*"—small in numbers, but powerful in talent, at the head of which stood one of the ablest men in the country, of the most extensive political experience and political learning; whose whole life had been spent in the public service, and whose private character was eminently pure and above all reproach. It is obvious that Mr. Tyler had no alternative. It was almost a political necessity. He was compelled to throw himself into the arms of that third party.

Mr. MEADE, of Virginia, here rose and addressed the Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Does the gentleman from New Hampshire yield the floor?

Several voices. Go on, go on.

Mr. WILSON said: I must decline yielding the floor. I have never attempted to interrupt any gentleman when he has been addressing the committee or the House, and I must insist on my right to proceed without interruption.

Situated as Mr. Tyler was, he called into his Cabinet a distinguished citizen from the gentleman's own State, (Mr. Upshur,) and confided to his care the State Department. He was a gentleman of eminent talents, of great legal attainments and literary acquirements, although not extensively known to the country as a politician and diplomatist. He was understood to be in sympathy with the third party to which I have alluded. No sooner was Mr. Tyler's Cabinet made up thus, than this Texas question was again brought under discussion with this new feature. Texas had before applied to this Government for admission. She had begged and implored the United States to accept her. Now the tables were turned. This country went begging, soliciting, importuning Texas to come and unite with us. A correspondence was opened upon the subject, induced by the facts stated in certain mysterious letters, which our Secretary of State had received from somewhere and from somebody, upon the danger which was said to be impending over the slave interest in Texas, and consequently the slave interest in this country. This correspondence was carried on between our Secretary of State and a General Murphy, as I believe, who was the agent of this Government in Texas. Our agent was instructed to represent to Texas, as an inducement to her to comply with our wishes, that unless she united with the United States, slavery could not be maintained in Texas for ten years longer. A treaty for the annexation of Texas was under consideration by the Secretary of State and the agent of Texas; but, before that treaty was perfected, or in condition to be submitted to the Senate of the United States for ratification, that eminent citizen, to whom I have referred, by a most mournful accident, while on a steamboat pleasure trip down the Potomac, suddenly ended all his negotiations upon the earth, and was called to his last account with his Maker above. The great head of that third party, to which I have referred, was called to the head of the State Department, and addressed himself to the completion of the treaty, until it was perfected and sent to the Senate. But when it reached that body, instead of having a majority of two-thirds in its favor, (which was necessary under the Constitution in order to the ratification of any treaty,) it was rejected by a majority of two-thirds. Two-thirds of the Senate, after deliberate investigation, put their seal of condemnation upon that treaty; and that vote of the Senate, as I believe, was a very fair exhibit of the popular sentiment of the country upon the subject at the time. But the slave power did not yield to that most signal and emphatic expression.

This was the state of affairs in regard to Texas, when there was a certain meeting

of politicians in the city of Baltimore, in May, 1844. This scheme for the annexation of Texas was not to be defeated. The general sentiment of the country, as expressed by the signal defeat of the treaty in the Senate, was treated with the most marked contempt. The subject of the annexation of Texas was brought up in the Baltimore Convention. It was literally forced upon the great Democratic party by the overbearing and violent course of management of the southern delegates in that Convention. I speak the solemn truth when I say that, at that time, a great majority of the Democratic party at the North were opposed to the annexation of Texas. I could cite an overwhelming mass of testimony, would time permit, from the public newspapers of that day, from resolutions of public bodies, and from various other sources upon that point, that upon investigation could not leave a doubt upon any honest mind. The whole North, of all parties, prior to May, 1844, were almost unanimously opposed to annexation. But the Baltimore Convention, a self-constituted body, coming together professedly to nominate candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency, took the subject in hand; they made the question of annexation the test of party fidelity; they adopted certain party catch-words. "Texas and Oregon" were tied together by a kind of illicit semi-hymeneal bond. The Democratic party of the North and West were to be cheated, humbugged, inveigled into the support of the candidates of that Convention; and that done, the great North was to be overrode by the annexation of Texas. "Oregon" was thrown in to cheat, deceive, and impose upon the honest Democracy of the West.

When the party managers at the Baltimore Convention (and, mark you, it was subject entirely to southern management) proposed that the question of entire rights and claims in Oregon should be carried into the canvass, were they sincere; were they honest; did they really intend to insist upon the whole amount of our claims in Oregon at all hazards? Let the result answer. The western politicians undoubtedly thought them sincere. General Cass spoke often and vigorously in the Senate upon the subject, claiming the whole of Oregon, and declaring that the Administration of Mr. Polk would insist upon the whole to 54° 40'. He spoke undoubtedly of the President's purpose, and said that England would not yield, and that "war is inevitable." The words "war is inevitable," wrung through the whole country. The phrase became ridiculously common throughout the land. Another western Senator "cried aloud," with a voice that might be heard from Capitol hill to the Grand Monadnock, "*We will have to 54° 40', or we will fight.*" And another, still more eloquent than either, held similar sentiments. Things went on this way for some three months of the session of 1845-'46, and I verily believe the Western Senators and the great Western Democratic party were deceived, thoroughly overreached and imposed upon by this Southern political jugglery about Oregon. I am led to this conclusion from a scene I witnessed in the Senate during one of the days about the last of February or the first of March, 1846. A Democratic Senator from North Carolina, (Mr. HAYWOOD,) rose calmly in his place, and coolly, with placid countenance and gentlemanly bearing, administered a chilling rebuke to the "war is inevitable" 54° 40' or fight men, by telling them plainly that they misunderstood Mr. Polk altogether. That he was ready to compromise the Oregon boundary line upon 49°.

Sir, I can never forget that outburst of eloquent indignation, towards the President, from a Western Senator, upon this accredited announcement being made by the Hon. Senator from N. C. "What," (said the Hon. Senator,) "is it possible the President is going to desert us? Can it be that he will assent to the abandonment of any part of Oregon short of 54° 40'? If he does, he will sink to an infamy so deep that the hand of the resurrection will not reach him."

But I must go back to the Baltimore Convention of May, 1844, for the purpose of examining its doings a little more minutely, and more fully to illustrate my position that the slave power, whenever it resolves upon carrying any measure, never abandons it, never lets any means escape it which may tend to aid in the accomplishment of its purpose.

Prior to the assembling of the Baltimore Convention of May, 1844, who had heard the name of James K. Polk, of Tennessee, mentioned for the Presidency? Had it been placed at the head of any Democratic newspaper in the country, and kept there for any length of time, before that Convention? If it had, sir, I must say I had never seen it, had never heard of it; and, from that day to the present, I have not seen the first man who had seen it, nor the first visionist who had ever dreamed of such a thing. Who did not know that, at the assembling of that Convention, "the Northern man with Southern principles" had a large majority of its delegates in his favor? Several of the members from the North avowed openly that they would go into the Convention as the uncompromising friends of Mr. Van Buren. But the two-thirds rule was sprung upon the Convention, and that killed poor Mr. Van Buren dead as a hammer. He had written the Texas letter, and it was found necessary to kill him off, in order to secure the success of the slave power in accomplishing its purpose in the annexation of Texas. On the first ballot, it was found that Mr. Van Buren had 143 votes, while Mr. Cass had but 90. But, as the balloting continued, these candidates so far changed sides that, while Mr. Van Buren went down nearly to 90, Mr. Cass went up to about 140; and then they let him go. The slave power had accomplished its purpose—it had defeated Mr. Van Buren. Did the southern men then intend to nominate General Cass? Were they sincere in running him? No! they could have done so if they had pleased. General Cass was then understood to be a Wilmot proviso man, and long after that entertained the same sentiments. No; the politicians of the South were not sincere; they were only using General Cass, a northern man, as the wood-chopper uses his beetle—they swung him round and round, bringing his great weight to bear, until, by repeated blows, they beat the brains out of the unfortunate little Dutchman; and then, upon examining the tool with which they had been operating, they found it battered, split, shivered into splinters, and they threw it unceremoniously away, as unfit for further use.

The ballottings for a candidate for the Presidency continued through some 33, 34, or 35 different trials, if my memory is accurate. The excitement became intense, if credit is to be given to the facts as stated by the letter-writers who witnessed it, and we may well infer that from the published journal—an adjournment took place. An artificial state of things had been produced by the management and manœuvring of the southern politicians. It was a point at which they had been aiming from the commencement. Then came expressions of great concern and alarm for the safety of the great Democratic party. Then suggestions for a compromise—*compromise*, that ill-fated word, so fatal to every northern interest. Compromise carried the day. All the former candidates were dropped, and a compromise effected upon James K. Polk, who was nominated the next morning. For effect he was dubbed Young Hickory. On the flag of the party was inscribed *Polk and Dallas—Texas and Oregon*; it was given to the breeze and was successful. And I would now ask, where is the honest northern or western Democrat who can study this chapter of the political history of his party, and say that he feels proud of the record?

The election of Mr. Polk settled the question of the annexation of Texas. Other frauds, to be sure, had to be practised; other and deeper wounds had to be inflicted upon the Constitution in order to do it. But the election of Mr. Polk gave to the Slaveholding-Texas-annexation party, the Executive patronage of the Government, and the rest was easily accomplished. Time does not permit me to pursue this particular branch of the subject further.

I come now to the consideration of the general question of the power and duty of Congress in regard to the subject of slavery in the Territories. That Congress has the power to legislate for the Territories, cannot admit of a reasonable doubt. I look upon it now as merely a question of expediency, whether Congress will or not legislate upon that subject. I do not stop to argue about its constitutionality. The time for argument on that question has long since gone by. That power has been exercised by Congress; has been recognised and acted upon ever since the adoption of the Constitution. If Congress can do anything for the Territories, it can make laws

in relation to the subject of slavery, to have effect within the Territories, as well as anything else. Slavery cannot exist anywhere except by positive law, it being in derogation of natural right. Now, sir, I regard slavery as a blighting, withering curse upon every country with which it is infested. It passes over a country like a prairie fire; it burns up every green thing on the face of the earth, and, not content with that, it penetrates into the soil itself, and burns out its very power of productiveness. You cannot, Mr. Chairman, look out from one of the windows of this Capitol, in any direction, and let your eye traverse the surrounding country, without seeing convincing evidence of this truth. The earth itself, the dilapidated buildings and ruined fences, become vocal in attestation of it. You cannot walk through the public market place of this city without seeing full and convincing proof of it. The dumb beasts, yea, even the yokes and gears and implements of husbandry on the slave plantations all around us, speak out and bear unconflicting testimony of the blighting effects of slavery. Is this institution, then, with such characteristics and attendant evils, to be sent into the Territories over which Congress has jurisdiction, by the exercise of the law-making power? Or, in other words, shall it be permitted to go and spread itself over those Territories to curse and ruin them, when Congress has the power to prevent it?

The American Colonies passed laws to restrain the slave trade here before the Revolution, and asked the royal approval of those laws, which the British King, influenced by the base and sordid motives of his English subjects, withheld. The colonists, seventy-five years ago, were loud in their condemnation of the King for withholding his approval. Shall we, the members of an American Congress, in a free republican government, in this age of christian light and christian philanthropy—shall we send an institution to curse and crush the people of our Territories, of which our fathers justly complained of their governors for sending upon them three-fourths of a century gone by?

Congress, it was said the other day by the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Preston,) held only a trust power for the Territories—a mere temporary power, which we must soon surrender. Very well; I agree to that; but I maintain that Congress is bound, in good faith, to take due and proper care of the estate while it is in possession for the benefit of the *cestui que trust*. The trustee is not at liberty to abuse the trust; not at liberty to embarrass or encumber the estate; not at liberty to permit it to deteriorate in value; not to send upon it by order, or to permit a trespass upon it by his negligence, the blighting curse of the slave institution.

I hold that Congress is bound to take care of the Territories, and so execute the trust as will best promote the permanent interest of those who may hereafter be entitled to the beneficial use. As a member of this Congress, I feel that I sustain a part of that responsibility, and it is my desire to acquit myself worthily in meeting it. I desire so to acquit myself that my own conscience will not upbraid me, and that, when I shall pass away, no reproach shall fall upon me, or my children after me, for my acts here upon this momentous question. I have, sir, an only son, now a little fellow, whom some of this committee may have seen here. Think you that, when I am gone, and he shall grow up to manhood, and shall come forward to act his part among the citizens of the country, I will leave it to be cast in his teeth, as a reproach, that his father voted to send slavery into those Territories? No; oh, no! I look reverently up to the Father of us all, and fervently implore of Him to spare the child that reproach. May God forbid it!

Sir, let Congress give to those Territories free institutions and equal and just laws—institutions and laws that will improve, enlighten, educate, and elevate those who are now there, those who may hereafter go there, and the generations that may be born there in all after time. Those are the institutions and laws, and those only, that I am willing to be instrumental in sending into that comparatively new country.

I have said that it is characteristic of the slave power to accomplish all its political purposes in this Government. I must now say that I think the power and influence of slavery over the action of Congress is impaired, if not entirely gone. I

make this declaration, not because I have any confidence in the politicians of the day. No, sir; I have none whatever. The politicians are just as ready now to betray their constituents as they ever have been. I am sorry to say there is evidence enough of this. My confidence is in the people. They have taken the matter into their own hands; they have brought themselves into order of battle and line, without the word of command from any political leader. There they stand, with front rank and rear rank, and rank of file-closers, in position, with bayonets at a charge. They have spoken to their Representatives in a voice of thunder, and warned them against abandoning their interests. They have bid them do it at their peril. The constituencies have challenged their Representatives to betray their trusts, and skulk, and retreat upon them, *if they dared*. And, sir, the constituencies have spoken "*upon honor*." They are determined, and will execute their purposes.

There was a time when, if the slave power had any special work to be done, and wanted a northern man to do it, they hunted him up from New Hampshire; little, unfortunate New Hampshire was called upon to furnish the scavenger to do the dirty work. That day, thank God, has gone by, and it will not come again very soon.

The reform has been the work of the people themselves. Politicians have had little to do with it. I think they rather resisted it; but the people triumphed, and the work is well done. If I do not misjudge, it is universally so throughout the whole extent of the northern States, from the Passamaquoddy bay to the head waters of the Des Moines river.

I was surprised to hear the declarations made the other day by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. THOMPSON) upon this subject. I was almost led to infer from his remarks that, in Indiana, the people went with the slave power in its measures, and that the free labor of that noble, thriving, enterprising State was ready to surrender all its interests to the supervisory care and tender mercies of the southern politicians. On inquiry from other sources, I learn that it is not quite so; and, if I am not mistaken, when that gentleman comes to explain the positions taken in his recent speech to the free laboring people of his district, he will be met by difficulties hard to overcome.

The North are not disposed to trespass or interfere with the rights of the South. Where slavery exists within the States, and recognised by the Constitution of the United States, the northern people claim no right to interfere with it by any political action of this Government. The people ask no action by Congress on the subject of slavery within the States. But gentlemen need not ask me for my vote to extend the institution of slavery one single inch beyond its present boundaries. Did I say *an inch*, Mr. Chairman? Aye, I would not extend it one sixteen thousandth part of a hair's breadth. I would not extend it, because it would be doing an irretrievable wrong to my fellow man; because it would be doing irreparable wrong to those Territories for which we are now to legislate; because it would be doing violence to nature and to nature's God; and because it would be a wicked and wanton betrayal of the trust confided to me by the free, intelligent constituency which has done me the honor to send me here.

It shall not be in the power of any man to shake a menacing finger at me, and look me in the face with a gibe of contempt, and say to me, in the insulting language of a former representative from Virginia, (Mr. Randolph,) "we have conquered you, and we will conquer you again; we have not conquered you by the black slaves of the South, but by the white slaves of the North." No, sir, that remark never shall apply to me. Gentlemen need not talk to me, or attempt to frighten me, by threats of the dissolution of the Union. Sir, I do not permit myself to talk or even think about the dissolution of the Union; very few northern men do. We all look upon such a thing as impossible. But, sir, if the alternative should be presented to me of the extension of slavery or the dissolution of the Union, I would say, rather than extend slavery, let the Union, aye, the universe itself be dissolved! Never, never will I raise my hand or my voice to give a vote by which slavery can or may be

extended. As God is my judge I cannot, I will not, be moved from the purpose I have now announced.

The difficulties which surround us, springing from this question of slavery, are the natural result of the different character of the labor of the two districts of country. In the free States of this Union labor stands upon a different footing from what it does in any other part of the world. There, labor is an independent agent. It works when it pleases, for whom it pleases, where it pleases, at what it pleases, and makes its own terms and conditions. The laboring man stands upon his own rights. He chaffers freely with his employer how he shall be fed, furnished, lodged, and what sort of specific conveniences for his labor shall be furnished to him. In that free country, when a man wishes to employ a laborer, the parties, the employer and the employed, stand upon a perfect equality the one with the other. The employer states what he wants done, and asks of the laborer if he can do it. If he gets an affirmative answer, the price per day, week, month, or year is talked of and agreed upon. The laborer does not pull off his hat to his employer, but stands on a perfect equality with him; and when they both come to the ballot-box, there again there is perfect equality. The one has just as good a vote as the other.

Is there such a labor in any other part of the world? I venture to assert that there is not. Is there such an enviable condition of labor to be found in our own country, south of Mason and Dixon's line? Let us look a moment and see how it is there. The gentleman at the South, if he wants anything done which requires manual labor, throws himself down upon his lounge or his easy chair, in his office or study, and, without any disturbance or consultation from or with anybody, considers of the matter he wants accomplished. He has no bargains to make, no disagreeable chaffering with a laboring man about prices of labor per day, or week, or month, or year, and board and lodging, &c. Nothing of all this. When he has properly considered his object, and the force necessary to accomplish it, he considers how much it will cost him to purchase the requisite weight of human bones and muscles, wrapt up in black skins, to do his work. He asks no consent of the laborer. He judges what board and lodging and conveniences are necessary to be furnished to the laborer. The laborer has nothing to say about all that. There is an obvious, a marked difference between the labor of the North and the South. Every laborer at the North, (and northern men are almost all laborers,) is a free man. He has a vote, and sustains his just share of the sovereignty. The great mass of the laboring men at the South are slaves, and have, individually, no share of the sovereignty—the master has three-fifths of it for them.

Compare the labor in our free States with the condition of labor in France, England, Germany, Russia, or any other part of the Eastern Continent. You will find that labor there, instead of being the free, independent agent it is here in our free States, is substantially a dependant agent—the mere subject of arbitrary power. It has no alternative but to work or to starve. Such has never been the degraded condition of labor in our free States; and, by the blessing of God, I hope it never may be. It cannot be, if the free laboring people understand their rights. That free labor is becoming tired of the control of the slave power of the South; a power which is constantly exerting itself to prostrate the just political influence of the free laboring portion of the country, and to check, restrain, and embarrass that free labor in its efforts to attain a high degree of industrial prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, I have but very imperfectly accomplished the duty I had assigned myself on this momentous question; but I am admonished that the pendulum of the clock is upon its last vibration of the hour allotted to me. I have made up the record of this day's work of my life—imperfect I know. But I am willing it should be unrolled and read by the whole people whom I have the honor to represent; I am willing it should be read by the people of this great country; above all, I am willing it should be unrolled and read by the light of eternity, in the presence of the assembled universe, and to abide the decree of the Omnipotent Judge upon the record.